



## ROBIN'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

By CLARISSA MACKIE

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"Two days to Christmas, eh, Robin?" quavered old Aunt Hetty as she peered at the farm's almanac in her lap.

"Yes, Aunt Hetty," replied Robin, stirring the orange peel into the mince-meat with vigorous strokes of her strong young arms.

"When is the Sunday school tree?" "Tomorrow night, I wish you felt like going, Aunt Hetty. You would see the singing and the lights and see the people."

"Maybe so, dear, I'll see how I feel. Just give me my knitting, dearie. I must finish the parson's muffler."

Robin brought the knitting basket overflowing with bright colored silks and the half completed muffler for the young clergyman. Her blue eyes were very bright.

Two years ago—it had been Christmas eve—the parson, young Anthony Drake, had whispered to Robin that there was a gift for her on the tree, and something in his look and the tone of his voice led Robin to believe that in the sky's proffered gift lay the expression of his love for her.

But the evening had passed uneventfully. The presents had all been distributed from the tree, and though Robin's name had been called a number of times and she had gone up to receive sundry mysteriously tied packages, not one appeared to be from the young minister. Robin was deeply offended. She could scarcely believe that Anthony would stoop to jest with her upon such a tender subject as their newly awakened love for each other, but when she found that he avoided her and that his manner grew cold and distant Robin shrugged her pretty shoulders and began a violent flirtation with Ed Willis, the schoolteacher.

"I haven't been to a Sunday school Christmas tree for two years," murmured Aunt Hetty, knitting vigorously.

"I remember," said Robin quietly. "You slipped down on the ice and sprained your ankle that night."

"And a sight of trouble it made me," sighed Aunt Hetty. "I remember I just dumped all the things I got off the tree into my worktable drawer, and there they are now—the popcorn ball, as hard as a rock, and the orange, shrunk to almost nothing, and a mess of little presents I never looked at. I was so upset."

"I'll take better care of you this time," promised Robin.

"You won't want to be bothered with an old woman, dear."

"Why not?" laughed Robin cheerily.

Aunt Hetty flashed her a queer glance. "I thought perhaps you were Robin with Ed Willis."

Robin flushed warmly. "I'm doing with you or not at all," she said firmly.

Aunt Hetty was silent for a long while, then she asked, "You are going to help Mr. Drake trim the tree tomorrow afternoon? Most of the other girls are going."

"Perhaps so. There will be so many there you'll miss me," said Robin, and Aunt Hetty was quick to note the tinge of bitterness in her tone.

"Mr. Drake always said you was his star helper," said the old woman quietly. "You got your pie crust made?"

"Yes, indeed, auntie. I'm going to fill my pie now. Just taste this mince-meat and tell me if it isn't almost as good as you can make."

Aunt Hetty took the spoon and tasted its contents, nodding her head approvingly. "It's perfect, Robin. You've done credit to my teaching. I believe your poor nan would say so if she was alive. Don't forget to save your prettiest pie for the parson."

"Very well," said Robin patiently, although her heart rebelled.

The Sunday school room was ablaze with lights and a glitter with reflections from the tinsel decorated Christmas tree that stood on the platform. Every seat in the room was filled when Aunt Hetty Tremblé limped up the aisle leaning on Robin's strong young arm. Somebody gave up places in the front row of chairs so that the late comers

could have seats, and then the organ rang out "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," while everybody stood up and sang it.

Ed Willis stood up from her book once and noticed that Aunt Hetty was whispering to Anthony Drake as she slipped a package into his hand. Her brief glance at his face surprised a look of mingled astonishment and disbelief as he went back to his place on the platform.

There were a prayer and more Christmas carols, and then Parson Drake came forward and announced that the distribution of gifts would take place.

"I would like to add," he hesitated, his eyes fixed on the clock in the rear of the room—"that there will be one gift on the tree tonight, which has been delayed two years in reaching its proper recipient. It was given by mistake to another person, who never looked at it until today. I think the recipient will understand."

With a very red face Parson Drake whipped out a pocketknife and detached a package from the tree.

"Willie Brown!" he called. And Willie went forth to receive a book and a bag of candy.

After that names followed thick and

fast, and boys and girls and grown-ups went to the platform with empty hands and came back laden with packages, oranges and bags of candy, and presently the whole room was a pleasant buzz of talk and laughter.

As for Robin Tremblé, she sat there like a beautiful statue of snow ever since the parson had made his announcement concerning the delayed present. She wondered if it was for her. It could not be that Aunt Hetty had received it, although the old lady had given the minister a package. But that package would contain the knitted silk muffler for Mr. Drake. Robin shrugged her shoulders impatiently. Of course the delayed gift was a book for one of the children. She turned to smile down at Aunt Hetty, who was taking childish pleasure in a lapful of gifts from the tree.

"Miss Robin Tremblé," read Parson Drake, and Robin's face grew paler as she went to the side. No one noticed her going save Aunt Hetty, who looked anxiously at Robin as she came back with a large box of books and two pink tarlatan bags of candy.

Other names followed, and a greater confusion of sound seemed to shut Aunt Hetty and her niece from the crowd.

"You got two bags, Robin. Let me see what you've got," whispered Aunt Hetty.

Robin looked down in her lap. Sure enough, there were two pink tarlatan

bags, and she had made that very day and two other in the shape of a stock bag, she recognized as the early bags used two years ago.

They looked left to sudden trembling. Was it possible that this was the delayed present—the one she should have received two years ago? If so, then she had received Aunt Hetty's stocking that year and Aunt Hetty had received the precious one, and in the pain of her sprained ankle had tucked it away and forgotten it until that very day.

She lifted her eyes and met the burning glance of Anthony Drake—he was watching her. He had been waiting two years for his answer. Her fingers curled on the drawing that fastened the top of the stocking, and she saw a handful of withered popcorn and stale candles.

There was something else—a small Christmas looking envelope with a red seal and her name in a handwriting that brought hot blushes to her cheeks.

Once more she glanced up shyly and met Anthony's questioning eyes. Her swiftly lowered head may have betrayed her secret, for he turned away with a glad smile.

## Christmas Morning



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Robin took up the envelope and drew out the little card with its few pencilled words. Her eyes filled with tears. Who but shy Anthony Drake would dream of proposing matrimony on a Christmas card?

Aunt Hetty reached a wrinkled hand over and squeezed Robin's fingers. "You'll have to blame me, dearie," she whispered softly.

"It's all right now," assured Robin, her glad eyes on Anthony, who was speaking to the hushed assemblage.

He was thanking them for their splendid gift of money for a new roof for the church. He thanked them in dividually and collectively for the various gifts he had received from them, and then his eyes asked Robin a question and received an answer.

"I have to thank God for another very beautiful gift," he said reverently. "It came to me this evening quite unexpectedly, and please God the gift will go down the years with me, helping me to be a better man."

Robin looked at him, and he looked at her, and they both smiled. "My gift is here," completed Anthony Drake.

But Robin believed that God had given her the greater gift.

## Some Christmas Celebrations

How Holiday Is Observed In Various Sections of the United States

It was not really the Fourth of July instead.

The stores are full of firecrackers at this time, and every child in the south has his firecrackers and cannons and horns and the like. The noise starts at midnight Christmas eve, and all day long the crackers and toy cannons are fired. The bands march around playing the favorite southern songs, "Dixie" and "My Maryland," and the soldiers march the streets to the strains of the music, stopping now and then to fire salutes. This is the happiest time of the year to the southern children.

Santa Claus visits them just as he does the children in the north.

Among the Pennsylvania Dutch you never hear of Santa Claus. If you were to be there at Christmas and talk about him the children would ask you who you were talking about. The "man with the pack," who visits them is called Polzickel, and the mother of bad children often threatens them with the saying:

"You'd better be good or Polzickel will catch you!"

Some old man in the neighborhood always plays the part of Polzickel on Christmas eve and dresses up so the children will not recognize him and starts out. On his back is a large bag of toys, which he holds in place with one hand, and in the other hand he holds a switch. Then he comes to the door and asks the mother if the children have been good. To those whom she says have been good he gives presents, and the bad ones he catches—if he can—and playfully strikes them with the switch which he carries.

Among the descendants of the old Spanish settlers in some parts of America we find that they observe a week in the celebration of Christmas. This begins one week before Christmas. In the daytime they have dinners at each other's home, and in the evenings they give a series of parties at the different houses. In the evening the young folk go to the home of one of their number and knock, and then all begin to sing. These within the house ask, "Who is there?" and the answer is, "The Virgin Mary and St. Joseph seeking lodging in your house." To carry out the little story they are at first refused admittance, and then the door is opened wide, and they are all given a hearty welcome.

On Christmas eve the old and young all join together and have a big celebration. In a large hall they fix up one side to represent the manger, and here they very solemnly give a little play, in which many take part, the characters being Mary and Joseph, the wise men, the shepherds and the angels. This play is very real to them, and they all play their parts with a reverent spirit.

Christmas Day.

To rule and reign with gentle sway.

The King of Love was born to-day.

No palace walls enclosed him round.

Put in a manger was he found.

That on the lowly world might see

The greatness of humility.

He came, a child, in lowly grace.

That so a child might seek his place.

So poor was he the humblest born.

Might come without a fear of scorn.

To all mankind he showed the way.

And ushered in the dawn of day.

And so with grateful love and praise

We hail this blessed day of days.

The children's joy, the poor man's feast.

The star of hope to great and least.

When holy angels come to earth

And sing anew a Saviour's birth.

Merry Christmas to all.

## Christmas Eve

By ROSE B. VAN SPEECK

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THERE is a holy hush in the twilight gray that ushers in the Christmas day.

There's a solemn look in the stately trees

And a strange restraint in the winter breeze.

All nature's athrill with a great amazement

On the threshold of this day of days.

The sky agleam with its myriad stars.

The clouds were more glorious at sunset's bars.

The faces of men have a tender glow;

Their voices in cadence are soft and low.

And heaven is a little nearer earth

On the evening that heralds the Saviour's birth.

ANCIENT YULETIDE CUSTOMS

The Druids and Romans Both Used Evergreen Decorations.

The use of evergreens at Christmas comes from the Romans, who thus ornamented their temples during the feast of Saturn, while Ivy was universally used in forests in honor of Bacchus.

The ancient Druids hung green branches and mistletoe over their doors as a propitiation to woodland spirits; they used also to cut green trees and carry them into their houses to protect the spirits of the forest and streams from the death dealing winds, thinking the spirits, thus protected, would go forth in the spring to re clothe the forests with beautiful foliage and unlock the ice bound streams.

A survival of this superstition was found among the English peasantry not more than 200 years ago. They hung evergreens in their cottages in the belief that they would attract sprites and that the boughs would remain untripped by the frosts and furnish a shelter for the woodland deities.

"Standard trees" in the city were originally "nailed" full of homes and Ivy, showing that the external aspect of Christmasting was a public concern to the days of our ancestors.

Origin of the Word Christmas.

The word Christmas is of comparatively late origin. The word was first used in 1658, its form then being Christes-Mass, the mass of Christ.

Origen, an early father of the church, said that in the Scriptures it was the sinners alone, not the saints, who celebrated their birthdays. Another early writer referred to the fact that the birthdays of the pagan gods were kept by the people. The very first evidence of a feast having been held in honor of the birth of Christ was in Egypt, about the year 200. Clement of Alexandria said, "Certain Egyptian theologians overcuriously assign not the year alone, but the day of Christ's birth, placing it on Mar. 25." Another date assigned to the event was March 28.

"Christmasses Pies."

Mince pies now are generally round, but there was a time when they were of a long, coffin shape and were, in fact, often referred to as "coffin pasties." But this somewhat gruesome name and shape do not appear to have detracted from their popularity. Scottin, for instance, in the edition of his "Jests," published in 1823, is reported to have said on his deathbed, "Masters, I tell you all that stand about me, if I might live to eat a Christmasses pie I care not if I die by and by after, for Christmasses pies be good meat."—London Chronicle